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ABSTRACT

Ten randomly sampled college reading/study skill texts published since 1987 were analyzed based on external text aids and validated research recommendations. Many articles exist that contain a detailed description of one specific skill such as mapping, underlining, sequencing, etc., but only one recent article, "Ten Recommendations from Research for Teaching High-Risk College Students" (N. Stahl and others), contained a wide variety of instructional suggestions which could accommodate these researched skills. The criteria were drawn from the above mentioned article and "Content Area Reading" by R. T. and J. L. Vacca (1989), and the results were charted, tabulated, and discussed. Research suggests that instructors should select a text that contains a wide variety of skills, but many published texts do not. Fifteen students who were in college or were college-bound selected a book of their choice and commented freely. The students overwhelmingly found most texts to be "boring, unmotivating, and unhelpful." The survey findings suggest that to select an appropriate text instructors of remedial study skills courses should have a good knowledge base of the latest research, as well as a strong concept of the method they wish to incorporate into their program. Findings suggest (and earlier research states) that the usage of a wide variety of texts may prove to be beneficial for the instructor of college remedial reading courses in order to incorporate research recommendations. (Contains a list of works cited for analyzed texts and 16 references. Three appendixes of data are attached.) (RS)

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College Study Skill Text Analysis

Based on Validated Research Recommendations

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Abstract

Ten randomly sampled college reading/study skill texts were analyzed based on external text aids and validated research recommendations. Many articles exist that contain a detailed description of one specific skill such as mapping, underlining, sequencing, etc., but only one recent article Ten Recommendations from Research for Teaching High-Risk College Students contained a wide variety of instructional suggestions which could accommodate these researched skills. The criteria was drawn from the above mentioned article and Content Area Reading by Vacca and Vacca(1989) and the results were charted, tabulated, and discussed. Research suggests that instructors should select a text that contains a wide variety of skills, but many published texts do not. A student survey was also conducted to gain a better view of the student's perspective of the texts. The findings suggest that instructors of remedial study skills courses should have a good knowledge base of the latest research ,as well as a strong concept of the method they wish to incorporate into their program in order to select an appropriate text. Our findings and research states that the usage of a wide variety of texts may prove to be beneficial for the instructor of college remedial reading courses in order to incorporate research recommendations.

College Study Skill Text Analysis Based on Validated Research Recommendations

A review of the literature from *Books in Print* (1994-1995) demonstrates that hundreds of reading or study skills college textbooks are available for pedagogical use. These textbooks utilize a variety of instructional strategies and are often selected on a individual basis. Recent comparative information, although beneficial, appears to be lacking or limited to one or more specific instructional skills or strategies (Stahl, Brazo, Simpson, 1987). Would information formulated from viable research discussing the content of recent reading developmental texts be beneficial in selection of classroom texts?

Whenever possible a combination of information should be available to assist those individuals or educators in their selections of texts. These selection decisions require overall knowledge of the materials, and research to support the choices made. A previous study demonstrated common elements of seventeen texts, and provided a guide for text selection for the future (Randencich, Schumm, 1984). The format or guide, however, was quite detailed, and would require a great deal of time to process. A content analysis of 47 college learning skills textbooks was provided by Heinrichs and La Branche (1986) which stated that the use of more than one text appears to be the best approach. Finally, the most recent study examining college reading instruction done from an historical perspective indicates that a research basis for utilization of content techniques was lacking, and there was no collective consensus as to what skills were appropriate to course format (Stahl, Norman, 1987). The purpose of this study is to describe and examine ten college study and reading skill texts that were published since 1987 for organization, and the use of research suggestions for the teaching of college developmental courses.

The following are the operational definitions of the terms used for organization. Organization refers to the external text aids that demonstrate how a text is designed or constructed. The categories that were examined under organization and research suggestions are as follows:

Summaries- descriptive paragraph found at the end of a chapter that outlines the key points of the chapter.

Motivation-includes the use of pictures, other aids, or explanations of reasons to learn a specific skill throughout the text.

Print- this includes the use of bold print, headings, and marginalia throughout the text.

Index- did the text contain an index.

Skills/Strategies- the usage of the concepts of mapping, outlining, underlining, etc. whether learned or internal.

Research Suggestions- the 5 chosen were selected from the anchor article Ten Recommendations from Research for Teaching High-Risk College Students, and are listed in detail in the measures section

These are the factors or categories to be examined and were suggested by Vacca and Vacca in Content Reading, and by Stahl, Simpson, and Hayes in the anchor article respectively. But the question still arises "Are there texts available that will enable an instructor to teach a developmental reading/study skills course with a wide variety of skills and strategies from foundations in research?"

Method

Subjects

Six texts were then compiled along with four other randomly chosen texts obtained from B.G.S.U. and Firelands Campus'. In order to eliminate some bias the texts were covered and numbered. To examine such a diverse population of texts only

those texts that could contain a wide variety of instructional strategies and practice exercises that might be used in a workshop setting were examined. For example, a Theme-centered text would most likely not have been examined because the probability of the usage of a wide variety of skills along with practice drills would be minimized. This aided in eliminating a lack of continuity in the format of skills and approach to text design. Ten texts were selected at random from a collection of eighteen texts received from a survey. These ten texts include the following: Reading Beyond Words, Setting Objectives for College Reading and Study Skills, Academic Reading and Study Skills, Methods of Inquiry & Technology of Change, Study Skills in Practice, Reading Enhancement and Development, Developing Reading Versatility, Reading and Study Skills I, Reading and Study Skills II, College Reading and Study Skills.

Measures

The process used to collect data was informal. The measures dealing with organization were based on whether or not the following external text aids were present in the texts: summaries, motivation, and print. Vacca and Vacca in Content Reading suggest that external text aids are an important factor when examining texts. The contents of the texts were also broken down into categories consisting of a classification of recommendations from research. Research provided various articles that discussed single skills such as mapping, underlining, and outlining. Some of the research discovered proved to be very controversial. Caverly and Orlando (1991) examined the value of the usefulness of mapping. They conclude "if students can assess their abilities, the text, and the context, outlining and mapping seem to be effective strategies for improving the recall of main ideas, although not necessarily the details" (p. 141). Maxwell (1993) states that mapping often does not improve comprehension unless it is combined with another skill. Although only one recent comprehensive article was found that reflected the concepts that utilized a variety of skills from research. Five out

of ten recommendations were analyzed since all ten recommendations were found to be difficult to cover in one text. The five that were selected were chosen because they represented the broader concepts found in the research and allowed for usage of a wide variety of research validated skills. The following recommendations from Ten Recommendations from Research for Training High-Risk College Students by Stahl, Simpson, & Hayes will be analyzed for the study:

1. Broadening Conceptual Knowledge

Does the text promote the use of developing schema or background knowledge by the introduction of schema and/or an explanation of its use or an offering of extensive reading from outside sources?

2. Reconceptualize Vocabulary Development

Does the text provide for three or more vocabulary strategies that incorporate or stress: self-selection?, how to learn technical vocabulary?, innovative techniques?, multiple definitions?, and synonyms/antonyms?

3. Writing

Does the text provide for writing activities such as: summaries?, daily writing logs?, an directed writing activities?

4. Use of Research Validated Learning Strategies

Does the text reflect two or more learning strategies such as: SQ3R?, PQRST?, PORPE?, as well as how to choose from these?, and/or how to develop one's own strategies?

5. Use a Course Model that Stresses Transfer of Skills Learned.

Does the text contain an explanation or practice of the following: examples of real content the students will encounter?, and knowledge or practice of where the specific strategy is pertinent?

Procedures

Correspondence was sent to the six leading national publishers requesting recent texts containing strategies for teaching college reading/study skills courses. Only Harcourt, Brace, and Company from Troy, Michigan responded and donated six texts. These six texts were compiled with four others from B.G.S.U. and Fireland's campuses. While waiting for responses from the publishers extensive research was conducted on the topic of developmental courses and their texts. An anchor article emerged from the research along with a purpose and hypothesis. The texts were analyzed in respect to organization from Vacca and Vacca, and to the recommendations from the anchor article. The analysis was charted for easy reference. See Appendices A, B, C. The analysis was used to gain results and to foster discussion.

Results

Organization as described by the use of summaries at the end of the chapters was found in two of the texts. Motivation was found in one of the texts. Bold print, subheadings, and marginalia was found in eight of the ten texts. Indexes were found in seven of the texts. Three texts did not contain an index.

Our findings indicate only two of the texts demonstrated both extended readings, as well as an explanation or introduction to schema and its usage. Two texts introduced schema, but not the use of extended readings or reading from outside

sources. While books did not introduce or utilize the concepts of schema at all, two books had extensive reading, but not other knowledge of, or introductions of schema.

Vocabulary strategies of three or more were not found in any text. Two or more strategies were found in four texts. One strategy was found in four texts, and two texts demonstrated no strategies or were very weak. Strategies that stress self-selection were found in three texts, technical vocabulary was in three texts, innovative teaching was found in three texts, multiple definitions was found in one text, and the inclusion of synonyms and antonyms was found in three texts.

Writing by the use of either summary instruction, daily logs, and a directed writing activity was unavailable in one text, summaries were located in nine of the texts, daily logs was mentioned in only one text, and directed writing activity was demonstrated in six of the texts.

The use of two or more research validated learning strategies were not found in any of the texts. SQ3R was found in seven of the texts while PQRST or PORPE was not found in any of the texts examined. The selection of an appropriate strategy was utilized in two of the texts, and the concept of developing one's own strategy was mentioned in three.

The use of a course model that stresses transfer by the explanation or practice of real content that students will encounter was found in all ten texts. The knowledge or practice of where the specific strategy is pertinent was found in only one text.

Discussion

Organization as analyzed included summaries, motivation, print, and the presence of an index as defined in the introduction. Although summaries have been illustrated as an effective strategy tool for comprehension. "Summarizing encourages the deep processing of information that leads to retention and understanding" (Erickson & Strommer, 1993, p. 116). It is felt that the actual usage of summaries within the text at

the end of chapters would aid students in the internalization of the concept or strategy. It was odd to note that this strategy which could so easily be demonstrated within the text was absent in 80% of the analyzed texts. Another factor that most teachers are aware of and research has validated is motivation as defined in the introduction. Motivation can be helpful in encouraging students to learn. According to Gall et al. (1990), "the motivational processes involved in studying are just as important as the cognitive processes" (p. 23). Yet, only 10% of the texts analyzed contained a significant amount of motivation. There was one text that utilized the defined components as listed as well as pictorial testimonials from other students throughout the entire text. It is the personal opinion of the authors of this article that this text was outstanding in this particular area.

Print as defined in the introduction was found in virtually 100% of the texts. It appears to be universally accepted that bold print, headings and/or marginalia are an accepted practices amongst publishers.

The convenience of an index is obvious to most readers. It is helpful in locating the specific ideas as well as a time saving to the student, yet 30% of the analyzed texts did not contain an index. It was discussed by the authors of this article and it was assumed that indexes should be an intricate part of all texts.

There appears to be extended research on the use of broadening conceptual knowledge and schema. Stahl, Simpson & Hayes (1992) recommend concentration on schema, as well as reading for pleasure to enhance prior knowledge. Overall, the random texts that were selected demonstrated a poor usage of this recommendation.

Vocabulary was analyzed as stated and defined in the method section. For example, self-selection or the ability to allow students to select their own vocabulary of interest was found to be weak. The authors allowed for a wide variety of vocabulary strategies and research indicates that vocabulary is an important issue. ""Historical precedence and day-to-day practice provide evidence that vocabulary

instruction...serves as one of the four instructional cornerstones of the college developmental reading program"(Stahl, Brozo, Smith, Henk, & Commander, 1991, p. 24). The texts were weak and provided a minimal amount of practice or strategies.

Writing as described in the methods section has a wide variety of research that claims the importance of writing as a component of a study skills program. Taylor (1985) states that writing in itself has been known to magnify the benefits of reading experiences for developmental college students. Strotsky (1983) also states that writing has been demonstrated to be parallel process with reading and making meaning. However, there was not a sufficient amount of activities that would allow students to gain efficient internalization of the concepts.

"Instruction with textbook study systems (e.g., SQ3R, PQRST) has been a staple of the college reading/learning program for over 50 years (Claverly & Orlando, 1991; Stahl & Henk, 1986). Although SQ3R is the most widely researched learning strategy and some controversey still exists it was accepted in the majority of the texts. Usage of these strategies was limited to drills and weak in the provision of the actual concept.

Transfer was analyzed and examined as stated in the method section. The texts overall were weak, however two of the texts provided excellent and very strong examples based on the authors of this articles subjective point of view. Research has proven that transfer is a useful skill. Nist and Simpson (1987) feel that there is a need to teach students how to transfer the skills and strategies that are acquired through their college reading course to other courses. It was interesting to note that this was another area that was lacking in the texts examined.

The conclusion of the research is that instructors of remedial study skills courses should have a good knowledge base of the latest research , as well as a strong concept of the method or philosophy that they wish to incorporate into their program. Study skills texts can then be selected according to these specific needs. More than one, or a wide variety of texts may be helpful if the instructor has the knowledge of each texts

strengths and weaknesses. It is believed that any sound or successful study course should be evaluated by the students as well. An important aspect of this study was to poll a small number (15) of students who were in college or college bound for an informal and subjective view of the texts examined. The students were allowed to select a book of their choice and freely comment. It was interesting to read the stated comments as the students overwhelmingly found most texts to be "boring, unmotivating, unhelpful, hard to follow, etc." Although it is understood that students often cannot evaluate effectively based on their knowledge of the overall concepts, it was noted that one text Methods of Inquiry & Technology of Change contained the most number of criteria from the set of predetermined criteria. The students comments stated that the text was "helpful, organized, interesting, etc."

In summary , after analyzing and examining the ten college study skill and reading texts that were published since 1987 for organization and research suggestions for the teaching of college developmental courses the authors of this article have recommended that the texts that were used in this study should include the recommendations from research with a higher frequency than was found. Instructors should also be aware of the contents of their chosen text or texts and utilize according.

Appendix A

	Summaries	Motivation	Print	Index
Text 1	no	no	yes	no
Text 2	no	no	yes	yes
Text 3	no	no	yes	yes
Text 4	yes	no	yes	yes
Text 5	no	no	yes	yes
Text 6	no	no	yes	yes
Text 7	no	no	yes	yes
Text 8	no	yes	yes	no
Text 9	yes	no	yes	yes
Text 10	no	no	yes	yes

	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3	Text 4	Text 5	
Broaden Concept. Know.						
Extended Reading	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	
Intro Schema	no	yes	yes	no	yes	
Reconcept. Vocab. Dev.						
Self selection	no	no	no	no	no	
Technical vocab	no	no	no	yes	yes	
Innovative Teaching	no	yes	no	no	no	
Multiple Def's	no	no	no	no	no	
Syn/Ant	yes	no	no	yes	no	
Writing						
Summaries	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Daily Logs	no	no	no	no	no	
DWA	no	yes	no	yes	no	
Res. Val. Learning Strat.						
SQ3R	no	no	yes	yes	yes	
PQRST	no	no	no	no	no	
PORPE	no	no	no	no	no	
Selection of	no	no	no	no	no	
How dev. own	no	no	yes	no	no	
					no	
Course Model Transfer						
Content examples	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Know. of Strategy Place.	no	no	no	no	no	

Appendix B

	Text 6	Text 7	Text 8	Text 9	Text 10	
Broaden Concept. Know.						
Extended Reading	no	no	no	no	no	
Intro Schema	no	no	no	yes	no	
Reconcept. Vocab. Dev.						
Self selection	no	yes	no	yes	yes	
Technical vocab	no	no	yes	no	no	
Innovative Teaching	no	yes	yes	no	no	
Multiple Def's	no	yes	no	no	no	
Syn/Ant	no	no	no	no	yes	
Writing						
Summaries	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Daily Logs	no	no	yes	no	no	
DWA	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Res. Val. Learning Strat.						
SQ3R	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	
PQRST	no	no	no	no	no	
PORPE	no	no	no	no	no	
Selection of	no	no	yes	yes	no	
How dev. own	no	no	yes	yes	no	
Course Model Transfer						
Content examples	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Know. of Strategy Place.	no	no	yes	no	no	

Appendix C

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